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AUTHOR Jean, Paula J.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Salient Issues (SI) is a paper-and-pencil test designed to measure a subject's tendency to consider sex role issues as salient ones within the counseling experience. Issues within the instrument are masked. SI is intended for use in a repeated measures design in order to assess trends within groups and across groups. In this study, the construct validity of SI is investigated. Eight male and 10 female students in three graduate courses--Sex Roles in Counseling (SRIC), Practicum Counseling (PC), and Multivariate Analysis (MA)--completed SI at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the semester. Subjects were asked to rank order the following subscales: (1) promoting sex role insight; (2) focusing on communication skills; (3) stimulating information gathering; (4) facilitating compromise; and (5) helping the client adjust to the situation. A two factor mixed-model Multivariate Analysis (MANOVA) was selected: Group (SRIC, PC, MA) was considered a between factor and time (beginning, middle, end) was deemed a within factor. Rank was considered a dependent measure. Each subscale was analyzed separately. A trend in the data revealed that the subscale, "promoting sex role insight," appeared to be sensitive to the sex role awareness instruction in both importance and rank. (Author/RL)

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Salient Issues: A New Technique to Measure The Effectiveness of Sex-Awareness Programs

Paula J. Jean, Barbara Sterrett Plake, and Teresa LaFromboise

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Abstract

A variety of educational programs have been designed to promote sex-fair counseling. Evaluation of these approaches has relied, however, on measures that are often transparent in purpose or insensitive to subtle change. The Salient Issues instrument has been developed for use in a repeated measures design. Trends in the salience of various counseling approaches can be measured across time while the sex role awareness component is masked. The present study investigated construct validity of the instrument and trends in the data suggest that the technique is a potentially powerful one for evaluating the effectiveness of sex role awareness courses.

Salient Issues: A New Technique To Measure The Effectiveness of Sex-Awareness Programs

Documentation of sex bias within the counseling profession began in the early 1970's (Broverman, Broverman, & Clarkson, 1970); Chesler, 1972; Tennov, 1975). As a response to this recognized bias, an APA Task Force (1975) assessed the relationship between sexist attitudes and the counseling relationship. The value system of the counselor was identified as central to the problem of sex bias and the task force recommended the development of training programs to educate potential counselors in this area. A variety of training approaches have been used, including one or two day workshops (Applegarth, 1976; Briggs, 1976), role playing modules within existing courses (Gilbert & Waldroop, 1978) and experiential groups (Follingstad, 1977; Kahn, 1975). To evaluate the success of these educational approaches, researchers have measured attitude change with such scales as the AWS (Spence & Helmreich, 1972) and measured behavior change by assessing responses to videotaped counseling analogues. By these measures, the adequacy of proposed training approaches has been uneven, at best. Researchers suggest that poor evaluation has been the result of small sample sizes, short treatments, inadequate follow-up, and the insensitivity of measures to subtle changes (Applegarth, 1976; Briggs, 1976). Of identified methodological problems, the insensitivity or inappropriateness of the measurement instruments is the most complicated dilemma. Especially in pre and post-test designs, subjects are generally aware that sex bias is

being measured. The instrument, as well as the context, make the researcher's agenda an obvious one. Harris and Lucas (1976), in a study of students' attitudes toward sex role stereotypes and mental health, noted that "the publicity of the feminist movement may have increased reluctance of people, particularly university students, to acknowledge openly their belief in a sex-stereotyped notion of mental health" (p. 393). Counselors in training within a university framework, are likely to have sufficient social awareness of feminist perspectives that they can respond to these commonly used measures of attitude and behavior change in an unbiased manner regardless of their private attitudes and behaviors. Results of such research, then, may well be confounded by demand characteristics.

The Salient Issues instrument is being developed with these measurement problems in mind. Salient Issues is a paper-and-pencil test designed to measure the subject's tendency to consider sex role issues as salient ones within the counseling experience. The sex role issues within the instrument, however, are not obvious. In addition, the agenda of the researcher can be masked as subjects are told that the instrument is a measure of preference for various counseling approaches. Salient Issues is intended for use in a repeated measures design in order to assess trends within groups and compare trends across groups. It is expected that this instrument will be particularly useful in full semester courses to assess the impact of the course or modules

within the course, on the students' tendency to consider sex role issues as important ones within the counseling process.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the instrument's construct validity. Salient Issues has been designed to measure the development of a cognitive framework for thinking about sex roles and is based on the assumption that educating the nonsexist counselor requires more than empathy training. The ability to be empathetic is not, according to Gilbert and Waldroop (1978), necessarily positively correlated with the ability to detect sex bias. In addition, liberal attitudes, as measured by an attitude toward women scale, are not necessarily positively correlated with knowledge and information about sex bias (Sherman, Koufacos, & Kenworth, 1978). It would seem then, that empathy skills and nonsexist attitudes as well as knowledge and information about sex roles are all three necessary for the sex-fair counselor. This combination of factors suggest the need for a cognitive framework within which the counselor can think about and respond to sex role related issues. It is assumed that a course, or module within a course, focusing on sex roles will both provide knowledge and liberalize attitudes. As students' concepts grow and attitudes change, a cognitive framework related to sex roles will become increasingly salient in their response patterns within a counseling setting. Salient Issues measures this salience over time by presenting students with hypothetical, paper-and-pencil counseling situations. In the present

study, students in three graduate courses--Sex Roles in Counseling, Practicum Counseling, and Multivariate Analysis--completed Salient Issues at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the semester. It was hypothesized that the Sex Roles course would have greater impact on the increased salience of the sex role response option than either the practicum course which stressed empathy training or the statistics course which served as a control. It was further hypothesized that the sex roles course would have greater impact on the rated importance of the sex role awareness response option than the other two courses.

Method

The construction of Salient Issues is similar to that of the Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest, Cooper, Coder, Masanz & Anderson, 1974). Both provide vignettes which are followed by a series of possible responses to be rated and ranked. The DIT, however, measures moral development and the response options represent different levels of a developmental hierarchy. Salient Issues does not, a priori, assume an appropriate heirarchy within the possible responses.

In the initial phase of the Salient Issues development, twelve vignettes describing presenting counseling concerns were written, six featuring male clients and six featuring female clients. The presenting problems are parallel for both sexes and focus on conflicts with the same and opposite sex as well as career-related and personal dilemmas. Nine raters determined (93% agreement) that the response options were

constant across the following five categories or approaches: promoting sex role insight, focusing on communication skills, stimulating information gathering, facilitating compromise, and helping the client to adjust to the situation. When the instrument was administered during the spring semester of 1980, each subject responded to all twelve vignettes on three different occasions. Vignettes were presented in random order and the response options for each vignette were in random order. Subjects were asked to rank order the approaches in each vignette (1 = most important to 5 = least important) and indicate, independently of the other approaches, the importance of each approach in a seven-point continuum (0 = unimportant to 7 = highly important). Subjects were informed that the study was an assessment of the development of individual counseling approaches over time. They were not aware of the focus on sex role awareness and the response options related to this focus, according to the raters, were not obvious.

Data Source. Subjects were 29 graduate students in three graduate level courses in Educational Psychology and Measurements at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Four subjects did not complete the study and the data of an additional four subjects was randomly dropped from the study in order to satisfy the assumptions of proportionality and maintain six subjects in each of the two treatment groups and the control group. The final analysis reflected 18 subjects, 8 males and 10 females.

Analyses. A two factor mixed-model MANOVA was selected; Group (Sex Roles, Practicum, Control) was considered a between factor and time (beginning, middle, end) was deemed a within factor. Rank and importance were considered as simultaneous dependent measures and, therefore, analyzed in a multivariate fashion. While rank and importance were considered simultaneously, each subscale (promoting sex role insight, focusing on communication skills, stimulating information gathering, facilitating compromise, helping client to adjust to the situation) was analyzed separately.

Results

Means, standard deviations and sample sizes for control, practicum, and sex roles classes at each time period for each subscale are shown in Table 1. Due to the small sample sizes within groups, the multivariate analysis of variance was unable to identify statistically significant group and time pattern differences on the majority of subscales analyzed. A summary of the MANOVA results can be found in Table 2. A significant group difference was found for the "helping client to adjust to the situation." Stepdown F values revealed that the group effect was present for the rank variable (Stepdown $F(3,28) = 4.53$, $p<.03$). A follow-up analysis showed that students in the practicum class ranked this approach as more important at the end of the semester than either sex roles or control classes, whereas at the beginning of the semester, practicum students ranked this approach as less important than the other two groups. Control and Sex Roles classes

ranked this approach as less important than the other approaches increasingly as the semester progressed. On the other hand, practicum classes expressed increased importance of this approach in relation to the other approaches as the semester progressed.

More interesting, however, are the trends that are revealed in the data. The primary subscale of interest in the education of sex fair counselors, "promoting sex role insight," appears to be sensitive to the sex role awareness instruction, in both importance and rank. The other subscales, which reflect many objectives of counseling training not necessarily specific to sex role awareness, show differential effectiveness for the two counseling classes as compared to the control. It appears that this instrument has high potential to assess sex role awareness outcomes separately from, and in addition to, other important factors of a counseling education program.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

Conclusion

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of courses focusing on sex role awareness for counselors-in-training, it is essential that both instruments and design be adequate for the task. It seems clear that treatments must be longer than a few days and that full understanding of the impact of a treatment requires designs that incorporate a control group and possibly alternative courses as well. In addition, instruments to measure success must be less transparent to subjects and more free of

demand characteristics.

Salient Issues is designed to evaluate semester long treatments in a repeated measures fashion. The instrument is not transparent to subjects and may be easily presented as a measure of counseling approach preference. Although the results of the present study are not significant, the trend in the results supports the hypothesis and suggests that further research with a larger sample is warranted to more fully investigate the instrument validity.

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Table 1

Importance and Rank Means, Standard Deviations and Sample sizes for Control, Practicum, and Sex-Role Class, at beginning, middle, and end of semester for each subscale.

Subscale 1: Promoting Sex Role Insight

			Time					
			Beginning		Middle		End	
Group	n	Variable	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd
Control	6	Importance	65.2	2.8	66.3	8.6	68.2	10.2
		Rank	24.2	5.7	24.2	6.0	22.2	6.4
Practicum	6	Importance	65.0	6.6	64.0	5.5	68.0	8.7
		Rank	23.5	3.9	24.2	5.5	22.0	6.5
Sex-Roles	6	Importance	60.0	9.2	70.8	[illegible].4	72.2	5.3
		Rank	25.2	4.2	20.5	5.4	18.2	5.2

Subscale 2: Focusing on Communication Skills

			Time					
			Beginning		Middle		End	
Group	n	Variable	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd
Control	6	Importance	63.2	5.9	62.7	8.8	63.7	9.5
		Rank	27.5	5.6	27.7	7.0	27.2	8.7
Practicum	6	Importance	60.5	7.1	63.7	6.4	66.5	7.7
		Rank	28.2	3.7	27.7	1.7	26.5	3.7
Sex-Roles	6	Importance	61.2	5.6	56.5	7.0	56.3	10.1
		Rank	30.7	9.2	32.2	7.2	34.5	8.9

Table 1, continued

Subscale 3: Stimulating Information Gathering

			Time					
			Beginning		Middle		End	
Group	n	Variable	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd
Control	6	Importance	42.3	11.1	36.2	8.6	41.3	19.8
		Rank	40.5	4.3	42.8	3.9	41.2	5.8
Practicum	6	Importance	45.5	5.4	43.7	8.8	45.5	8.8
		Rank	42.7	2.7	42.0	4.7	44.8	2.8
Sex-Roles	6	Importance	37.7	4.9	39.5	11.2	38.7	11.8
		Rank	41.3	5.3	42.0	7.3	42.2	4.3

Subscale 4: Facilitating Compromise

			Time					
			Beginning		Middle		End	
Group	n	Variable	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd
Control	6	Importance	44.5	10.4	48.7	9.5	49.5	15.1
		Rank	39.2	3.8	33.7	3.7	36.5	3.2
Practicum	6	Importance	52.8	8.4	53.2	6.6	58.0	9.3
		Rank	37.3	5.5	35.8	1.9	37.7	3.5
Sex-Roles	6	Importance	51.8	9.8	53.0	11.2	48.3	10.3
		Rank	34.5	5.2	35.5	3.8	35.8	6.3

Table 1, continued

Subscale 5: Helping Client to Adjust to the Situation

			Time					
			Beginning		Middle		End	
Group	n	Variable	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd	$\bar{X}$	sd
Control	6	Importance	24.0	13.5	20.2	9.9	22.7	10.1
		Rank	49.7	3.0	50.2	5.7	52.8	4.1
Practicum	6	Importance	35.3	10.5	32.8	13.4	40.8	15.6
		Rank	51.7	4.8	50.3	6.4	49.8	5.0
Sex-Roles	6	Importance	25.3	13.4	25.5	15.8	26.3	17.1
		Rank	47.3	8.3	49.8	7.2	50.2	11.4

Table 2

MANOVA F values for Importance and Rank Variables

Source	Subscale: 1	2	3	4	5
Between Groups	0.23	0.70	0.67	0.72	2.95*
Within Time	2.23	0.10	1.06	1.09	1.80
Time x Groups	0.75	1.44	1.01	0.94	1.31

*p <.05